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► To cite this version:

Damien Leroux, Nathalie Villa-Vialaneix. sexy-rgtk: a package for programming RGtk2 GUI in a user-friendly manner. 2èmes Rencontres R, Jun 2013, Lyon, France. pp.103-104. hal-00850516

HAL Id: hal-00850516

<https://hal.science/hal-00850516>

Submitted on 7 Aug 2013

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sexy-rgtk: a package for programming RGtk2 GUI in a user-friendly manner

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Keywords: Gtk2, RGtk2, GUI

There are many different ways to program Graphical User Interfaces (GUI) in R. [1] provides an overview of the available methods, describing ways to program R GUI with **RGtk2**, **qtbase** and **tcltk**. More recently, the package **shiny**, for building interactive web applications, was also released (the first version has been published on December, 2012).

The package **RGtk2** [2] is probably one of the most complete packages to program complex and highly customizable GUI. It is based on GTK2 (the GIMP Toolkit, <http://www.gtk.org/>), which is a multi-platform toolkit for creating Graphical User Interfaces. GTK2 offers a complete set of widgets and can be used to develop complete application suites working on Linux, Windows and Mac OS X. Although very flexible, each **RGtk2** interface results in a long script that has a counterintuitive syntax for most R users. For instance, the simple window of Figure 1¹ is obtained with the command lines provided in Figure 2 (left).

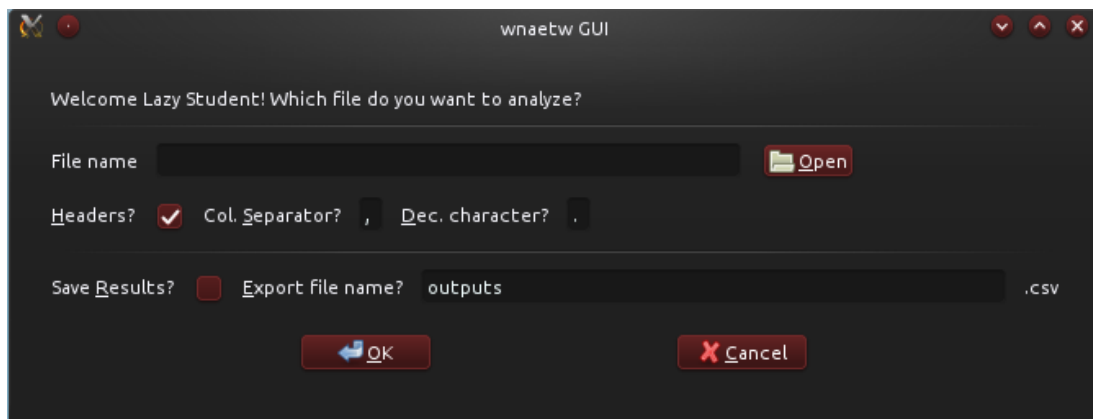


Figure 1: A simple GUI interface made with **RGtk2**.

One attempt to overcome the difficulty of the **RGtk2** syntax is the package **gWidgets** but, quoting its reference manual

*“The excellent **RGtk2** package opens up the full power of the GTK2 toolkit, only a fraction of which is available through **gWidgetsRGtk2**.”*

¹obtained on Kubuntu 12.04, Satanic Edition. The window’s appearance differs depending on the OS and on the system’s color configuration.

By automatically indexing all objects and methods available in **RGtk2**, we² developed a method for creating GTK2-based GUI, in a friendlier and more compact manner. Widgets are accessible with simple functions and options, as is more natural for a R language programmer. The window of Figure 1 is thus generated by the script provided in Figure 2 (right).

```

window <- gtkWindow()
window["title"] <- "wnaetw GUI"
vbox <- gtkVBoxNew(FALSE, 8)
vbox$setBorderWidth(24)
window$add(vbox)
hbox <- gtkHBoxNew(FALSE, 8)
vbox$packStart(hbox, FALSE, FALSE, 0)
label <- gtkLabelNew("Welcome Lazy Student!
  Which file do you want to analyze?")
hbox$packStart(label, FALSE, FALSE, 0)
vbox$packStart(gtkHSeparatorNew(), FALSE, FALSE, 0)
hbox <- gtkHBoxNew(FALSE, 8)
vbox$packStart(hbox, FALSE, FALSE, 0)
label <- gtkLabelNewWithMnemonic("_File name")
hbox$packStart(label, FALSE, FALSE, 0)
filename <- gtkEntryNew()
filename$setWidthChars(50)
label$setMnemonicWidget(filename)
hbox$packStart(filename, FALSE, FALSE, 0)
buttonOpen <- gtkButtonNewFromStock("gtk-open")
gSignalConnect(buttonOpen, "clicked", openFile)
hbox$packStart(buttonOpen, FALSE, FALSE, 0)
# ... (script is cut at 1/3 of its length)

```

```

main <- Window(title="wnaetw GUI",
  contents=Rows(
    Label("Welcome Lazy Student! Which file do you want
      to analyze?"),
    br,HSeparator(), br,
    LabeledWidget("_File location ",
      Entry(use.name='filename',width.chars=50),
      mnemonic=T),
    Button(from.stock="gtk-open", on('clicked',run=
      chooseFile()), fill=F),br,
    # ... (script is cut at 1/3 of its length))

```

Figure 2: **RGtk2** (left) vs **sexy-rgtk2** (right).

This method has been used for recoding in a very short and simple manner the basic GUI of the (toy) package **wnaetw**³. Also a function has been developed to ease the use of the function **rGtkDataFrame**. A data.frame object **res** can thus be displayed in a window with the single command **DataFrame(res)** instead of having to define individually each column renderer. This feature is illustrated in Figure 3. The method should be released as a package next summer but the first scripts, without documentation, as well as the demo code, are available upon request.

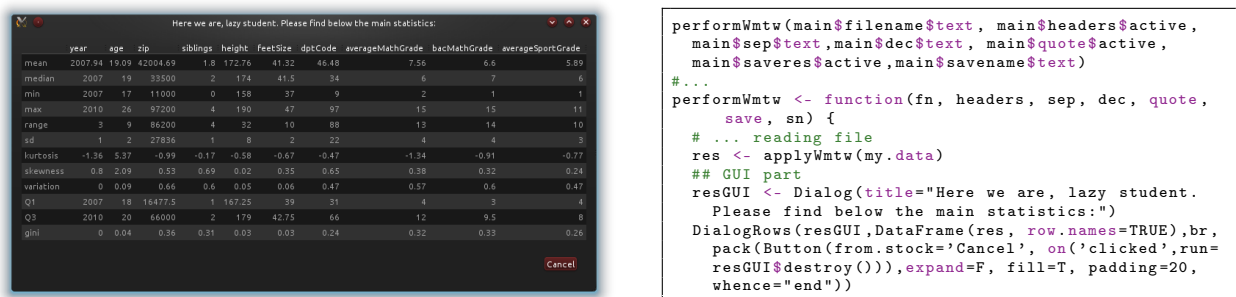


Figure 3: Use case example for the function **DataFrame**.

References

- [1] M. Lawrence and J. Verzani. *Programming Graphical User Interfaces in R*. CRC The R Series. Chapman & Hall, June 2012.
- [2] L. Michael and T.L. Duncan. RGtk2: A graphical user interface toolkit for R. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 37(8):1–52, 2010.

²The authors did not contribute equally to the work: Damien developped the method to extract and interface **RGtk2** objects and methods, whereas Nathalie was the friendly useR and beta tester.

³“What Nicolas’s Teacher Wants”, described at <http://tuxette.nathalievilla.org/?p=885&lang=en>.